

A Guide to Writing the Timed Essay

Prewriting

Use approximately 1/6 of the allotted time (10 minutes for a 60-minute essay; 5 minutes for a 30-minute essay) to:

1. Dissect the prompt.

Use at least two of the following strategies:

- A. Carefully dissect the writing prompt by underlining or circling the key words and making sure you understand the academic vocabulary.
- B. Rephrase the prompt in your own words (as a question, if possible).
- C. Draw an organizer or create a visual representation showing how the key words/ideas are related to one another.

2. Brainstorm and choose a topic.

- A. List or cluster topic ideas for the essay.
- B. Select a topic.

3. Plan the essay.

- A. Create a cluster, write an outline (remember three-part essay structure), or jot down notes (phrases, single words, abbreviations, etc.), detailing information that will be included in the essay. Make sure you are addressing the writing prompt—go back and check your outline against your prompt-dissection work.
- B. Follow these tips as you plan:
 - If a question asks for facts, make a quick list of facts that relate to the subject or question.
 - If you're asked for an opinion, write that opinion in the center of a cluster bubble, and then add ideas, feelings, and support for your opinion in connecting bubbles.
 - If you're asked to compare and contrast two items, look at your notes for all the details that show how they are alike, and then list the details that show how they are different. A Venn diagram might help you organize these details.
 - Put your thoughts in order. Identify the main point(s) you'll include in your answer first, and then add all the supporting information and details. (Use a formal outline if it helps you.) You can change the order as you write, but it helps to organize your ideas before you begin.

Writing the Essay

Use approximately 4/6 of the allotted time (40 minutes for a 60-minute essay; 20 minutes for a 30-minute essay) to:

4. Keep your audience in mind, and write to that audience.

5. Write a logical, well-organized essay using your cluster, outline, or notes.

- A. Introduce your topic by rephrasing the question prompt or repeating key words from the prompt in your first sentence. Get right to the heart of your essay with a clear thesis; do NOT write a lengthy introduction and do NOT repeat yourself.
- B. Completely explain each point you are making before going on to the next one. If you skip around, your answer will seem confusing and incomplete. Make sure each topic sentence relates to your thesis.
- C. Support your general statements with details, examples, and facts. Use specific people and events to show that you know your subject and to help your audience follow your line of thinking/reasoning. You must use examples, even with a short essay. If your answer is two sentences long, make the first sentence a thesis and the second an example.
- D. Don't be afraid to "think on paper." Some of your best ideas may develop as you write.
- E. When you finish making a point, make it clear that you are moving on to another point by using transition words, such as, *besides*, *in addition*, *next*, *however*, and *although*.
- F. When you feel you've covered everything, conclude in a sentence or two. *Don't simply repeat your opening sentence.* Use some of the main ideas you brought up in your essay.
- G. Stay aware of the time.

Reviewing, Editing, and Revising

Use approximately 1/6 of the allotted time (10 minutes for a 60-minute essay; 5 minutes for a 30-minute essay) to:

6. Reread your completed essay and revise.

- A. Make sure you have answered the question and have not strayed from the prompt.
- B. Look for mistakes you might have made on the facts (dates, names, etc.). If you need to make a correction, draw a single line through the old information and write the new information just above it. Don't waste time scribbling out old information.
- C. Check for complete ideas, clear thoughts, and details/explanations.

7. Be sure your paper is easy to read so your ideas stand out clearly

- A. Proofread for spelling, punctuation, and capitalization errors.
- B. Neatly make any needed corrections.